

Joyful Sorrow

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[0 : 0 0] see in the last three verses it came to pass while he blessed them he was parted from them and carried up into heaven and they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. These are verses which at the human level I have always found to be at the very least surprising and to some extent strange.

Here are the disciples they have been through all the trauma of Jesus being crucified and coming to terms with their own less than heroic response to his arrest and execution. Then they have got him back literally from the dead and over that 40 day period he has shown himself to them on various occasions and now just when they have been getting used to having him around again he's gone. Ascended into heaven taken away from them. How in the world is it that they can have returned to Jerusalem with great joy? You know how is how is it they can be continually in their temple praising and blessing God? Why are they not rather gutted? Why aren't they in bits? Because Jesus has been taken away from them again. Why are they not in the deepest of mourning that he's been taken away again just after they would have thought they had got him back. What is this that they are able to have to return to Jerusalem with great joy? What is this joy the Bible speaks about which is able to sustain those who have been physically separated here from the greatest love the world has ever known namely Jesus Christ?

It is interesting I think to compare the adjective happy with the term joy which may of course be used either as a noun or a verb you know joy may be something we feel we experience or it may be something we do.

I joyed went to the house of God go up they said to me. Everybody wants to be happy don't they? We we like to be happy and for our transatlantic cousins the pursuit of happiness is considered a veritable constitutional right.

[2 : 3 2] Does the Bible talk about happiness? Well yes it does. It uses the term 24 times and the word happier once as well so 24 25 times depending on how you count so it does talk about it.

It's interesting however to see how often the term happy is bound up with the Lord. And whatever is good whatever blesses whatever makes you happy is bound up with the Lord.

I'm here two or three examples we'll have to do. In Deuteronomy 33 at verse 29 we read Happy art thou O Israel Who is like unto thee O people saved by the Lord the shield of thy help and who is the sword of thy excellency?

Happy art thou O Israel In Job 5 verse 17 even when Job is talking about chastisement he says you know Behold happy is the man whom God correcteth Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty Even if you're getting discipline even if you're getting suffering if you know it's God who's doing it You know he's involved in your life You know he's you're getting his attention and that's got to be a good thing Job says Happy is the man whom God correcteth Despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty Psalm 144 verse 15 Happy is that people that is in such a case Yea happy is that people whose God is the Lord Now happiness suggests a successful well-blessed positive outcome Not too much intermingled with sorrow or suffering Just good times winning succeeding Happy am I said Leah with Zilpah's second son whom she could claim then as her own sixth

Happy am I for the daughters will call me blessed Genesis 30 at verse 13 So yes the Bible does talk about being happy And it mentions it 24-25 times depending on how you count But the term joy and its derivatives is numerically in a different league altogether If you'll forgive me for a couple of wee uses of statistics here Don't want to load down the message with statistics But it's interesting to note them The terms joyful or joyfully or joyfulness appear about 30 times in scripture The use of joy as a verb to joy in something appears 11 times And the term joy as a substantive noun that is something we experience Appears 124 times With a further 11 times for great joy So that's 135

times for joy or great joy

[5 : 28] That is something we experience Now obviously time will not allow us to investigate every single example just now But if we take just a few samples by way of illustration Then I would suggest to you that we do see certain characteristics emerging The Bible's very first use of the term joy Is found at 1 Samuel chapter 18 At verse 6 It came to pass as they came When David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine That the women came out of all cities of Israel Singing and dancing to meet King Saul With tablets With joy And with instruments of music You might think Oh well that's just a party They're just celebrating Because David's victory over Goliath And so on But you know What's the context here?

It is not merely a celebratory triumph But it is rather an acute awareness of having been narrowly delivered From a life threatening disaster This joy is bound up with a sense of deliverance And escape from almost certain death You think of the story With David and Goliath Goliath would come out Forty days I think it was He came out Chapter 17 Of 1 Samuel there And he says You know Send someone against me Anybody you like Send them against me He was huge Nobody could take him on The armies of Israel trembled And he said You know If he can beat me Then we will become your slaves Your servants But if I beat him You all become Our slaves Our servants Nobody could stand against Goliath The armies were terrified of him They expected to be defeated They expected to be overrun And enslaved That was the future that was facing them And everybody would have known about it

Everybody would have known that Nobody could stand against this giant And then David comes up And in the fear and the power of the Lord He defeats him And decapitates him And suddenly What was to have been great fear and terror Becomes a fantastic deliverance And they're free And they're excited And they're filled with this Joy Sense of deliverance From almost certain death The same would be true If we take another example We'll look at Esther For example Chapter 8 We'll read the verses 15 to 17 Mordecai went out from the presence of the king In royal apparel of blue and white With a great crown of gold With a garment of fine linen and purple And the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad The Jews had light and gladness And joy and honor And in every province and in every city Whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came The Jews had joy and gladness A feast and a good day And in chapter 9 verse 22

The days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies And the month which was turned unto them From sorrow to joy And from mourning into a good day That they should make them days of feasting and joy And sending portions one to another You see what's happened here?

You know the story of Esther? Well if you don't then It's about when the Jews were about to be wiped out In the Persian empire Somebody had it in for them He got the king to sign a decree To seal it That they were all going to be ethnically cleansed Exterminated throughout the entire empire And Esther the queen who was Jewish She came in She pled for her life for the king She managed to get the decree overturned So the Jews could defend themselves And so that they then had the upper hand And everybody suddenly was afraid of them And what was to have been the day of their destruction Became instead the day of their great victory Instead of being eliminated And annihilated They became the most privileged people group In the entire empire Deliverance From the very cusp of defeat From the jaws of death This fantastic deliverance That had been such a close shave And Queen Esther of course As the Bible tells us Had of course been brought to the kingdom

[9 : 39] For precisely such a time as that They had expected fear And death and destruction And they found instead Deliverance and strength and victory But they had come very close If we think of another Instance in the Old Testament You'll think Well the theory is about to break down here If you think of Nehemiah In chapter 8 verse 10 Well known verse He said unto them Go your way Eat the fat Drink the sweet Send portions unto them For whom nothing is prepared For this day is holy unto our Lord Neither be ye sorry For the joy of the Lord Is your strength Well known verse In the Old Testament The joy of the Lord Is your strength We think well That just shoots your theory down Doesn't it Because you know This is just celebration Look at the chapter They're just all sitting around Reading the word of God And the Levites are reading it to them And expounding them They're just rejoicing in the word of God There Yeah That's all true But again What's the context?

Think about what Nehemiah is about The walls of Jerusalem were in bits They were unbuilt The people finally gathered To start building Their enemies round about Threatened them They were threatening To overrun them Everybody was frightened They built that wall With absolutely

everybody Joining in There's lists and lists Of everybody who did Their own wee bit on the wall And they joined up to so far And somebody else did the next bit And so and so's family Did the next bit They laboured With a stone in one hand And a weapon in the other They didn't change their clothes They didn't rest They just kept on And on building Because they were terrified They expected They were going to be attacked They expected They were going to be Potentially wiped out But in the feet of the Lord They kept going And they kept building And they kept trusting in Him And they completed the wall And they rededicated themselves To the Lord That's what this reading Of His word was all about

And devoting themselves To the Lord And in the midst Of that deliverance They are to eat Drink Enjoy the good things Of the Lord And not be sorrowful And mourning Because The joy of the Lord Is their strength They had had A great deliverance They had had A bringing back From the threat Of death Surely They too Are seeing the ways In which the Lord Has worked amongst them They had Everybody joined in They had all built Because the threat Of death Was hanging over them A close shave A life threatening danger From which By the grace of God They have been delivered Let's look at One other example here Let's look at The very last Use of the term joy The final use Of the term joy The word joy itself In scripture And that's in Jude Jude chapter Verses 24 and 25 Where we've got this Again quite well known Verses Now unto him That is able

To keep you From falling And to present you Faultless Before the presence Of his glory With exceeding Joy To the only wise God our saviour Be glory and majesty Dominion and power Both now and ever There it is again Right enough The danger Of falling away Which each of us Is in The danger Of stumbling And letting go Of the Lord Or being broken Off from him Or losing our Inheritance If we take our Eye off the ball The danger Of falling And being lost And the deliverance Whereby we are Kept from falling Now unto him Who is able to Keep you From falling Who alone Holds us up Who alone Bears us In the palm of his hand Whereby we are Kept from falling And then presented Before the Lord With great Joy Sometimes it's only When we are Acutely aware Of how things Might be If we let go

That we become Aware of just What's holding us up I don't know Sometimes you ever Have an occasion Perhaps on holiday Or somebody Go across these Rope bridges Or tight rope bridges Or something Sometimes they have Little walkways That are made Of sort of metal grill And the metal grill Is such you can see Right through it You can see right down Into the gorge Or the river down below And you're walking On what you can see through And you're very conscious That what's holding you up Seems to be Very very fragile Now what's holding us up From falling Into the pit of hell What is keeping us From our lost eternity Is the grace of God Keeping us from falling Holding us up In the palm of his hand But there is always The danger The risk of falling If ever We take our eyes Off Christ Because nothing Can save us And nothing Can deliver us Save Jesus Christ Alone So there in Jude Yes again There's this Threat of danger From which They are miraculously Graciously delivered

[14 : 40] But you know To go back to Luke 24 And the end of Luke's Account of the gospel Is that what the disciples Have been going through At the end of Luke 24 Have they Just had a close run Deliverance From a life threatening Situation Well in one sense You could say That they have They have been convinced That the Messiah The fulfillment Of all the scriptures Their great hope For Israel And for the world Had been Successfully In inverted commas Betrayed By a disciple By one of their own Stitched up By the Jewish authorities And crucified By the Roman rulers Death Finish And all of that Was true But in the past Forty days They had discovered That although He had died He had risen From the dead Jesus Christ Had risen from the dead And in thus Overpowering And overcoming Death itself He had resoundingly

Defeated Our greatest Enemy of all Remember what Paul Writes to the Corinthians 1 Corinthians 15 The last enemy That shall be destroyed Is death Christ defeated Our greatest Enemy of all Not only that But in doing so He had opened The way To eternal life And glory In heaven With him For everyone Who would believe In him That's everyone In the entire World Who having heard This good news Would respond To it With positive Faith And believe In what Christ Had done This was amazing Stuff that they Were being exposed to It was phenomenal And it was beginning With the very Disciples Who in seeing Jesus crucified Had been convinced That death Had become The only certainty Even the Holy Scriptures Could no longer Have been completely Relied upon Because the one Who was the fulfillment Of all That they had

Foretold Had been brutally And cynically Murdered But now Literally Back from the dead Here he was To prove to them That the scriptures Had all been true Were still True All true Indeed were more True now Than they had ever been And they were all About him The living Christ The living Messiah The living word And his victory Was going to be Theirs too And now They had seen him Ascend into heaven Now they knew That he was there In heaven They knew he Couldn't die again He couldn't die anymore So yes You could say That this kind Of deliverance And being snatched Back from death And danger Did apply to them But But it isn't The only Application Or understanding Of the biblical Concept of joy

If we continue Through some of the places Where joy Or words involving joy Are used We see Something else Colossians chapter 1 We see it Verses 10 And 11 That ye might walk Worthy of the Lord Unto all pleasing Being fruitful In every good work And increasing In the knowledge Of God Strengthened With all might According to his Glorious power Unto all Patience And long suffering And I think If you have the ESV It says Endurance And patience With joyfulness Joyfulness How do you have a joyfulness In the midst of affliction And suffering Long suffering And the need for patience Well the Greek word Translated In the authorised version As patience And in the ESV As endurance Implies A right response To an adversity Over which one Has no control An adversity Over which one Has no control No choice That which is Translated as Long suffering Or in the ESV It says patience Implies Adversity Or difficulty About which one Does Have some choice Or control If you think of The fruit of the spirit Love Joy Peace Long suffering Notice how close Joy and long suffering Are in the fruit of the spirit Love Joy Peace Long suffering Gentleness Goodness Faith Meekness Temperance If for example If say I were in a country Where Christianity Was illegal And I got arrested For my faith I've got no choice Over that So that will be a case Of my needing patience But if for example In order to get Somebody else out I offer myself Up to the authorities And I give myself Up to the police Or whatever Then that's an example Of something over Which I do have A certain choice And for that I would need Long suffering For that I would need The endurance [19:44] The patience Which only the Lord Can give So different Greek words That mean slightly Different things here But whether the adversity Or the trouble Is avoidable Or unavoidable Whether we had Some choice Or no choice Or whether it's A mixture of both As Colossians chapter 1 Verses 10 and 11 Would imply A mixture of both Either way The trouble The suffering Is there It's right there Mixed in With the experience With joyfulness You debate all this With patience With long suffering With joyfulness How in the world Can there be joyfulness In the midst of all that It is as though The pain And the blessing Are intertwined As though you can't Really separate them out Like strands Of a cord Or a rope You can't separate them out That all part of it The pain And the blessing Are intertwined Let's look at another one

Hebrews chapter 10 We see verses 32 to 34 Called to remembrance The former days In which after You were illuminated You endured A great fight Of afflictions Partly whilst You were made A gazing stock Both by reproaches And afflictions And partly whilst You became companions Of them that were so used For you had compassion Of me and my bonds And took joyfully The spoiling of your goods Knowing that in yourselves You have in heaven A better And an enduring substance How can anyone You know Be joyful about being robbed Or ruined You know The spoiling of your goods But there it is Together in these verses This fight of afflictions That you're having This struggle Taking the spoiling of your goods And taking it joyfully How can you possibly Have joyfulness In the spoiling of your goods The ruination Of your property Nobody can get glee For you delighted About these things About all these things

So what does the Joyfully mean Well It says there In Hebrews 10 Verse 34 Knowing that in yourselves That ye have in heaven A better And an enduring Substance There's wonderful promise There's wonderful blessing But the pleasure And enjoyment And victory Is again Intertwined With pain And afflictions It is not joy Despite Pain And affliction But rather It is joy Through And in the midst Of pain And affliction Through the very Sufferings themselves As though they Heighten And intensify The extent Of the triumph And the sweetness Of the victory In the end There is a sense In which The higher the cost The greater the triumph

And the more valuable The prize At the end of it If you were to say Let's take a character Let me say The Duke of Wellington Say think of a battle That the Duke of Wellington Won And we'd all probably Think of Waterloo Well yes His greatest victory And you think Okay well What happened At the battle Of Waterloo The rate of casualties At Waterloo On an hour By hour Basis Was greater Than many battles Have for their Whole battle It was an absolute Slaughter On both sides You

know It's said by Some people Who served The force At that time After a normal Battle They'd look around And say Well who got killed This time And after Waterloo They'd look around And say Who's left Because that was The kind of cost To the forces There in Wellington State Of that victory And yet It's taken as being The greatest Of his victories The ultimate Deliverance Of the nation And of freedom

For a hundred years Until the first World war Started The cost Is part And parcel Of the glory But the cost And the price Would be Too high For us To bear Had we been Left To bear it Alone We cannot Pay the price Bear the cost That would bring us That joy That we need If it's going to be Intertwined With our joy This pain This suffering This loss It's too high A price For us If we were called Upon To bear it Alone Remember That the Lord Is exalted In the enabling Of his people To do What is difficult And beyond them But he is Glorified In doing That which Is impossible For as Jesus Said in Luke 18 Verse 27 The things Which are Impossible With men Are possible [24 : 46] With God God God Is glorified In the doing Of that Which is Impossible For us To show That he Is God Alone The pain Is Throughout And Intermingled With the joy The achievement The triumph The love The human Body Is Is An Astonishingly Complex And sophisticated Creation Think Of the way In which Arteries Veins Blood Vessels And little Capillaries And so on Cover the Entire Subsurface Of the body Carrying life And proteins And nutrients To every Inch Of it On a recent Holiday Myself and the Family were Down in Northumberland And in Newcastle There's this Science Sort of Exhibition Where they Have different Animals And creatures With the Skin stripped Away And sometimes It shows The muscles And sometimes It shows All the Different Organ workings And so on And part Of it Was showing The blood Vessel system Of different Animals And partly Also of Humans And it Covers The whole Sub Skin Being Of the Person All the Whole Subsurface Of the Body Carrying Life And proteins And nutrients To every Inch Of it But precisely Because The whole System Is so Thorough And comprehensive And well Designed There is not An inch Of the Body That is Invulnerable And if You cut Anywhere You will Bleed Remember What Paul Wrote to the Corinthians 1 Corinthians 12 He said Whether one Member Suffer All the Members Suffer With it Or one Member Be Honored All the Members Will Rejoice With it Now you Are the Body Of Christ And members In particular We are one Body in Christ One member Suffers We all Suffer One member Is exalted We all Rejoice With it Cut us Anywhere And we Bleed And the More High Powered Or strategically Vital Or significant Or life Bearing The vein Or the Artery That is Cut The more Severe Will be The life Blood That is Lost Part of Our life Blood Has been Lost And the Lord himself Knows We bleed And we Bleed Together Yet This Suffering Is Precisely Where the Bible Says The joy Will Somehow Still Be found Because the Pain Is Throughout And Intermingled With The joy The achievement The triumph The love The cost The cost Of the Triumph Is part Of the Glory Of the Prize If you Would think On something To encourage Us Think On the Price That the Church Has very Recently Paid In its Loss Think Of surely What The Lord Must Intend To do At such A cost Being Born By the Church Here Amongst Us The Pain Is Throughout And Intermingled With The joy Intermingled With The triumph Intermingled With The prize With The love With The cost Jesus Jesus Jesus Said John Chapter 16 Verses 20 To 22 Verily

Verily I say Unto You That Ye Shall Weep And Lament But The world Shall Rejoice And Ye Shall Be Sorrowful But Your Sorrow Shall Be Turned Into Joy A Woman When She Is In Travail Hath Sorrow Because Her Hour Is Come But As Soon As She Is Delivered Of The Child She Rememberth No More The Anguish For Joy That A Man Is Born Into The World And Ye Now Therefore Have Sorrow But I Will See You Again And Your Heart Shall Rejoice And Your Joy No Man Taketh From You The midst Of The Pain Of The Travelling Mother Is Precisely Because Of The Joy That Is On Its Way And Which Even Then Seeks To Come Forth And Will Do So At The Appointed Hour And When God's Time Has Been Fulfilled So You See When We Go Back [29 : 50] To The Disciples At The End Of Luke 24 Making Their Way From The Mount Of Olives Back To Jerusalem Having Said Goodbye To Jesus For The Last Time On This Earth Gathering The House Of God Praising And Worshipping I Don't Think Their Great Joy Was Because They Were Just Deliriously Happy And Felt Or Loss I Don't Think They Were Just Bouncing Along Gleefully I Think Their Joy Was Because They Realized How Close They Had Come To A Lost Eternity And That Christ Had Delivered Them Had Triumphed Over The Death And Had Been Their Greatest Their Greatest Enemies Defeat Defeated Death Itself And Their Darkest Fear All Their Lives Which Of Us Does Not Fear Death To An Extent But Christ Is The Victory Over Death He Had

Gone Through

It And Beaten It And Triumphed Over It And Come Back Again And Because Of What He Had Done They Would Do It Too And Because Of Where He Was Ascending Into Heaven They Would Ascend There Too And It Was Good News And It Was A Great Message To Give To The World And It Was A Full And Blessed Eternal Life That Was Up Ahead And At The Very Same Time This Great Prize Came At The Very Highest Cost And Intermingled With The Joy Was The Pain Of The Departure Of The Greatest Teacher And Friend That They Would Not See Again On Earth But Jesus Had Said Ye Now Therefore Have Sorrow But I Will See You Again And Your Heart Shall Rejoice And

Your Joy No Man Taketh From You Came To Pass While He Blessed Them He Was Parted From Them And Carried Up Into Heaven And They Worshipped Him And Returned To Jerusalem With Great Joy And Were Continually In The Temple Praising And Blessing God The Travelling Mother Is Still In Pain And Anguish Just Yet But She Will Be Delivered And The Life Already Begun Here In Every Believing Soul Will Yet Be Birthed Into The Glory That Awaits Each At Their Appointed Hour When The Time Is Fulfilled And The Kingdom Of God Is At Hand Let Us Pray